

DRAFT

BC First Nations

Economic Development Action Plan

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A. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

BC First Nations communities have relied on the lands, waters and resources in their traditional territories, as the primary economic driver for thousands of years. Today, many of the natural resources are rapidly depleting due to climate change, pollution, urbanization, natural and/or man-made disasters (i.e. mountain pine beetle infestation, oil spills). There are opportunities for First Nations to encourage and expand new and emerging economic and business developments to create sustainable communities without comprising their culture, heritage, or traditional territories. The challenge for BC First Nations communities is to identify these opportunities and develop viable economies, entrepreneurial initiatives and associated capacity.

To assist in meeting this challenge by enhancing economic investment and development, and increasing self-reliance and capacity, First Nations have called on the BC First Nations Leadership Council to facilitate the development of a BC First Nations Economic Development Action Plan.

The purposes of this First Nations-driven Action Plan are: to close key gaps that exist between First Nations and other British Columbians, including income and employment levels, and quality of life indicators; to create a climate to attract investment and generate wealth; and to foster relationships and create partnerships and opportunities for economic development. This Action Plan will achieve this purpose by setting out a collective vision, goals and principles, and concrete action items in each goal set out in this Action Plan.

B. CONTEXT

i. Political – BC First Nations

The Leadership Accord signed by the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs in March 2005 provides for a cooperative approach for all BC First Nations in the development of strategies and actions to ‘bring about significant and substantive changes to government policy that will benefit all First Nations in British Columbia’.

This cooperative approach has provided strength to BC First Nations and has aided in the development of substantive understandings with BC and Canada, including the New Relationship (2005) and the Transformative Change Accord (2005). Significant collaborations are also occurring in sector-specific areas, through the development and implementation of common action plans, including the *Tripartite First Nations Health Plan* and the *First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan*.

These key agreements signal a new era of unity and strength among First Nations and increased willingness on the part of all First Nations and governments to explore new ways of working together.

ii. First Nations Economic Development

All First Nations in BC have an indisputable connection to the lands and resources that comprise their traditional territories. First Nations sustainably harvested, traded, and benefited from their resources for generations, unfettered, until contact. Through misguided legislation and policy, over the past 150 years, both levels of government have successfully alienated BC First Nations from the lands and resources in their territories. This has devastated traditional First Nation economies, governance and community health and wellbeing.

The economic and social impact of this alienation to BC First Nations is stark:

- The First Nations unemployment rate is 2.5 times that of the general Canadian public
- Only 1/3 of Aboriginal people complete high school
- Aboriginal peoples have a lifespan 10% shorter than that of most Canadians

As a point of reference, from 1992 to 2006, the BC economy grew from \$87 billion to over \$180 billion, an average annual increase of over 5%.¹

First Nations in BC seek to re-develop their economies and derive the economic benefits that originate from the lands and resources in their territories. These benefits will, in turn, provide the necessary resources First Nations need to care for their people to raise the standard of living to an acceptable level.

iii. Existing First Nations Economic Development Assets

BC First Nations, at the local and provincial level, have participated in the development of organizations integral to economic development. This includes: sector-specific organizations and action plans; First Nations funds, lending and financing institutions; First Nations education, training and human resource development organizations; and First Nations policy, political and advocacy groups. All of these initiatives and organizations have developed strategic and action plans, most of which include a distinct economic development focus. Their participation, experience, and expertise is essential to the success of this Plan, and many of these organizations have been instrumental in its development.

iv. Moving Forward

¹ BC Stats

Through resolution, BC First Nations tasked the First Nations Leadership Council with coordinating the development of a BC First Nations Economic Development Action Plan. To achieve this, the First Nations Leadership Council coordinated dialogues with economic development experts, other First Nations organizations, government and industry to develop a draft Plan that was then discussed through various regional sessions in Fall 2007 and a province-wide First Nations Economic Development Assembly in February 2008.

The stage is now set for BC First Nations to make progress on economic development, and build on the successes achieved in many communities. First Nations, government and industry recognize the need for a coordinated province-wide economic development approach encompassed in a Plan that guides all interested parties and resources. Many partners have come together, committed to improving access to, and management of, economic opportunities by First Nations.

C. VISION, GOALS, PRINCIPLES

The purposes of this First Nations-driven Action Plan are: to close key gaps that exist between First Nations and other British Columbians, including income and employment levels, and quality of life indicators; to create a climate to attract investment and generate wealth; and to foster relationships and create partnerships and opportunities for economic development. This Action Plan will achieve this purpose by setting out a collective vision, goals and principles, and concrete action items in the following key areas: relationships; legislation and policy; capacity; structural; financial/capital; and sector-specific.

i. *Vision*

BC First Nations, through the exercise of title and rights over the lands and resources in their traditional territories, will achieve self-determination and prosperity for their people. First Nations, along with the people of BC and Canada, will achieve sustainable economic success and the eradication of poverty while respecting cultural and linguistic diversity.

ii. *Goals*

1. Economic Opportunities through increased First Nations lands and resources management and recognition of Aboriginal title and rights.
2. Create a climate to attract investment and generate wealth for BC First Nations.
3. Foster relationships with industry and government partners.
4. Increased First Nations entrepreneurship.
5. Information development to enable economic development.
6. Develop a skilled First Nation workforce.

iii. *Principles*

This Action Plan will be guided by the following principles:

- Recognition
 - The title, rights and culture of each First Nations community in BC, including the rights to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent, will be upheld.
- Good governance
 - Principles of good governance, including stability and the separation of business and politics, are the foundation of economic success.
- Environmental sustainability:
 - All economic development opportunities must be assessed in light of the needs of future generations.
- Community health and wellness
 - The purpose of economic development ventures is to increase the well-being of First Nations communities in BC.
- Inclusivity
 - The particular needs of elders, youth, women, the disabled, and all First Nations communities regardless of location will be considered.
- Unity, Collaboration, Coordination and Partnership
 - Respectful, effective working relationships will be established with all parties committed to the goal of achieving sustainable economic development for First Nations communities in BC.
- Commitment to Action
 - A proactive and dedicated approach will underpin all activities.
- Communication, Transparency, and Accountability:
 - All initiatives will be conducted in an open, clear and widely-understood fashion.
- Flexibility
 - This Plan, and the approach used to implement this Plan, will adapt with changing circumstances.

D. STRATEGIC GOALS

Goal 1:	Economic Opportunities through increased First Nations lands and resources management and recognition of aboriginal title and rights
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Context:

Implementing recognition of aboriginal title and rights is a priority for all BC First Nations, including recognition of the economic component of Aboriginal title through mechanisms such as revenue-sharing. Through this recognition, BC First Nations aim to create economic prosperity through participation in initiatives throughout their traditional territories.

Desired Outcome(s):

- First Nations governance of their traditional territories, including participation in associated economic development opportunities
- Sustainable revenues and resources to support effective governance
- Fostering and maintaining traditional economies

Action Items:

Providing an economic development perspective, work with other First Nations organizations to:

- Reform land claims negotiations policies based on recognition of First Nations title and rights in order to provide increased economic opportunities to First Nations communities
- Engage with federal and provincial governments in joint policy and legislative reform and development to increase access to lands, resources and economic opportunities for First Nations
- Implement revenue and benefit sharing models based on recognition, including in areas such as: natural resources (i.e. forestry, mining, energy, tenures etc.); taxation (i.e. GST, PST tariffs, duties, etc.); and other businesses (i.e. gaming, recreation, leasing, etc.)
- Establish arrangements for shared decision-making, land-use planning, tenuring and resource access

Goal 2:	Create a climate to attract investment and generate wealth for BC First Nations
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Context:

Economic development success for BC First Nations, like all government jurisdictions, will be determined by their ability to create a stable, attractive environment for investors and other partners. First Nations, BC and Canada can work to ensure the optimal governance, legislative and jurisdictional environment exists to attract investment capital.

Desired Outcome(s):

- Economically self-sufficient First Nations
- Streamlined processes / renewed policy to facilitate economic development
- Increased investment in First Nations projects
- Increased third party partnerships

Action Items:**Governance and Capacity:**

- Provide tools, supports and training to First Nations to develop and establish policies, plans and practices for economic development, business management, governance stability, leadership development, and community capacity development
- Leverage support for First Nations economic development capacity (i.e. to engage community economic development workers, etc.)

Community Support:

- Identify regional capacity development strategies
- Assess feasibility of establishing a First Nations corporation to own and manage assets
- Consider the development of a “one-window” approach to coordinate, and for accessing support and information for, capacity-building at all levels
- Consider the establishment of First Nations Economic Development Zones and/or First Nations regional centres (i.e. First Nations Chambers) to provide support to First Nations economic development through:
 - Accessing resources for financing of projects
 - Establishing a tools and resources library, including sample agreements, templates, and best practices
 - Holding workshops for First Nations
 - Providing advisory services and contacts for advisory services
 - Other

Legislation and Policy:

- Identify options to streamline processes for land acquisition and development
- Promote First Nations participation and capacity to manage reserve lands
- Work with other First Nations organizations on improving and developing land registry systems
- Apply streamlined and consistent process with respect to the purchase of lands for First Nations economic development in BC, including the additions to reserve process
- Identify and address capital infrastructure policy barriers that relate to economic development

Financing/Capital:

- Develop legislation for Development Cost Charges and Tax Driven Investment
- Support the development of community marketing strategies
- Consider amalgamation and expansion possibilities regarding Aboriginal Capital Corporations
- Institute recognition of First Nations as governments with respect to interest rates, credit rating, guarantee for major projects, bonding, financing, and taxation to stimulate economic development opportunities

- Implement a province-wide gaming revenue-sharing agreement
- Develop templates, toolkits and best practices for benefit agreements
- Establish a Venture Capital Fund, an Equity Fund, and a Green Development Fund
- Explore opportunities to establish First Nations tax and investment credits and models
- Hold investment forums with respect to First Nations economic development opportunities
- Work with other First Nations organizations to facilitate infrastructure improvements in First Nations communities (i.e. connectivity, roads, water, etc.)

General:

- Address material and performance business bonding barriers
- Explore opportunities regarding international free trade amongst First Nations
- Conduct joint International Trade Missions with BC and Canada
- Support the development of BC/Industry procurement policies and strategies

Goal 3:	Foster relationships amongst First Nations and with industry and government partners
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Context:

First Nations, industry and government all recognize that a greater future for First Nations, and for BC and Canada as a whole, requires a collaborative approach and continued relationship development. Mutually beneficial relationships have developed amongst First Nations and companies; and now partnership opportunities exist at a provincial level (e.g. Aboriginal Tourism BC and Tourism BC).

Desired Outcome(s):

- Relationships built on recognition of Aboriginal title and rights
- Effective partnerships between First Nations, government, industry and other organizations
- First Nations working successfully together to develop First Nations industries
- Maximize strategic investments efficiencies by working with governments and others

Action Items:

- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) / Accord with governments with respect to the implementation of this Action Plan, including working together to:
 - develop BC-specific recommendations on economic development; and
 - improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of economic development program and service delivery structures and approach, including aligning programming with this Action Plan
- Consider development of Economic Compact with Government and Industry to establish a common purpose and principles to stimulate economic development for First Nations
- Facilitate the development of working relationships amongst various funds and resources (i.e. New Relationship Trust, Aboriginal Capital Corporations, First Citizens' Fund, federal and provincial governments, Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement holders, First Nations Finance Authority)
- Nurture relationships, relationship/partnership agreements, information-sharing, resource pooling, and communications/networking:
 - Between First Nations
 - With federal and provincial governments
 - With other communities (including municipal and regional)
 - With industry (including corporate BC and unions)
 - With training and educational institutions and others
 - At international, national, regional and local levels
- Develop an Economic Development Partners Group with First Nations organizations, industry, and others to provide advice with respect to the implementation of this Plan
- Host regular Economic Development Forums (i.e. annual), including on a regional basis
- Coordinate with, and support, existing sector-specific institutions and/or action plans as they relate to economic development opportunities

Goal 4:	Increased First Nation entrepreneurship
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Context:

First Nation entrepreneurs are one of the fastest growing segments in business development; many First Nations individuals, living on and off reserve, are pursuing self-employment as an income option. First Nations, as they develop business opportunities, will be looking to community members/entrepreneurs to take advantage of increased economic development activity, and to balance the economic opportunities available to the Nation with those available to its members.

Desired Outcome(s):

- Increased levels of personal income
- Increased numbers of new businesses and number of mature businesses
- Increased funding available to support First Nation entrepreneurs
- Increased capacity of entrepreneurs

Action Items:

- Work with partner organizations to develop a First Nations entrepreneurship strategy
- Develop BC procurement legislation
- Develop toolkits, information guides and best practice guides for First Nations entrepreneurs
- Address issues with respect to security for borrowed funds
- Establish and/or support Equity Fund development and community lending circles
- Consider micro credit applications in village and urban settings
- Explore cooperatives as a tool for economic development
- Recognize First Nations entrepreneurial success stories through “BC First Nation Business Awards”

Goal 5:	Information development to enable, enhance and support economic opportunities
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Context:

In an increasingly information-dependent economy and age; it will be critical to future economic development success that initiatives are pursued on the basis of a sound knowledge base. First Nations that are proposing to develop projects with partners need accurate up-to-date information to guide discussions and negotiations. As well, to properly chart our collective progress over the next 5-10 years we need to establish a firm baseline understanding of our economic standing.

Desired Outcome(s):

- Research and data available to inform action and measure progress
- First Nations, Industry, Government and Educational Institutes working collaboratively to develop and maintain information

Action Items:

- Work with other organizations to develop a BC First Nations Report on the First Nation Economy (baseline study) that includes information on:
 - Demographics and statistics (i.e. employment and education levels, career choices and aspirations, etc.)
 - Information on the economy (i.e. First Nations contributions to the economy, existing First Nations initiatives, etc.)
 - Barriers and challenges (i.e. capacity, governance, legislation, etc.)
 - Opportunities (i.e. marketing, trade, partnerships, etc.)
- Continue to develop sector specific strategies (i.e. Aboriginal Tourism Blueprint Strategy)
- Develop industry background papers for First Nations use and reference, including on:
 - Natural resources (i.e. forestry, mining, carbon credits, etc.)
 - Technology
 - Tourism and recreation
 - Housing and resort development
 - Marketing
 - Logistical issues (i.e. zoning processes, shipping issues, etc.)
- Develop reference information on successful First Nation/Industry partnerships (i.e. Impact Benefit Agreements)
- Link economic progress to community health and wellness indicators and reports (i.e. share information on the economy with other First Nations organizations and incorporate information into government reports)

Goal 6: Develop a skilled First Nations workforce

Context:

Between 1996 and 2006, the First Nations population grew by 18% - more than four times the rate of the non-Aboriginal population in BC. The median age of the BC First Nations population is 27, compared to 41 for the rest of the BC population. As the provincial workforce ages, there is an increasing demand for trained professionals. These statistics suggest that we need to continue to create education, training and employment opportunities for the young First Nations population, including building on successful models such as those that have combined business and industry worker needs with available First Nations workforce.

Desired Outcome(s):

- A highly skilled and fully employed First Nations workforce
- All industry sectors actively recruiting, hiring and training First Nations

Action Items:

- Support individual First Nation initiatives:
 - Training and apprenticeships
 - Internships
 - Employment partnership agreements
 - Entrepreneurship
- With particular focus paid to successful models (i.e. in-community training, distance education, etc.), work with First Nations organizations, industry and governments to develop province-wide strategies for:
 - Executive exchanges
 - Secondments
 - First Nations Public Service
 - Financial planning and business training
 - Youth, elder and women's participation
 - Internships
 - Training and apprenticeships
- Promote First Nations as an employment solution for industry

E. IMPLEMENTATION

- Establish a BC First Nations Economic Development Council responsible for the implementation of this Action Plan including:
 - Supporting, and not interfering with, the autonomy and decision-making authority of individual First Nations
 - Leading a process to develop a structure, roles and responsibilities, and a clear terms of reference
 - Establish priorities, short-term objectives, and workplans
 - Advocating for legislative and policy change
 - Developing a communications and information-sharing strategy, including for public relations and awareness
 - Collecting, coordinating and sharing relevant economic development information
 - Providing economic development tools, advisory services and technical support to First Nations
 - Assessing collective business opportunities and economic ventures for First Nations
 - Conducting qualitative and quantitative analysis
- Consider the establishment of regional processes and institutions, overseen by the BC First Nations Economic Development Council to support the implementation of this Action Plan.
- Establish a forum (i.e. Partners Group) composed of First Nations, governments, private sector, sector-specific experts (i.e. gaming, mining, forestry, education, tourism, etc.) and other organizations to provide advice and support with respect to the implementation of this Action Plan.
- The BC First Nations Economic Development Council will work with governments and others to identify resources to support the effective implementation of this Action Plan.

F. MEASURING PROGRESS

- This Action Plan is intended to be responsive and dynamic. To gauge the effectiveness of this Action Plan, and ensure that it remains relevant and applicable over time, progress must be measured on a regular basis through the establishment of:
 - Timelines
 - Outcomes
 - Measures
 - Targets
- A baseline of information (“BC First Nations Report on the First Nations Economy” referenced in goal 5) must be established as an early priority, to assist with measuring progress over time
- The BC First Nations Economic Development Council will report regularly on progress inclusive of all First Nations, including through the assemblies of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit and Union of BC Indian Chiefs